

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 08599 121316Z

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UNCLAS BANGKOK 8599

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TAGS: PFOR, PINT, TH, LA

SUBJ: KHUKRIT ON VANG PAO AND OTHER LAO REFUGEES IN THAILAND

PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT HELD A NEWS CONFERENCE MAY 12.
FOLLOWING IS AN UNOFFICIAL USIS TRANSLATIONS OF HIS REMARKS
ON/VANG PAO AND OTHER LAO REFUGEES IN THAILAND.

"REPORTER: TURNING TO THE SUBJECT OF LAOS, GENERAL VANG PAO
HAS COME TO UDON ...

KHUKRIT: HE HAS COME HERE, BRINGING HIS FAMILY WITH HIM.
SINCE HE HAS COME HERE ALREADY, WHAT CAN BE DONE? HE HAS BEEN
DISARMED AND HE IS IN UDON AT PRESENT.

REPORTER: WHAT ACTION WILL WE TAKE?

KHUKRIT: TALKS ARE BEING HELD WITH HIM TO TRY TO PERSUADE HIM
TO RETURN TO LAOS.

REPORTER: HAS HE BROUGHT HIS FAMILY ONLY?

KHUKRIT: HE HAS A VERY BIG FAMILY DOZENS OF PERSONS, BUT...
(LAUGHS)

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 08599 121316Z

REPORTER: IT IS SAID THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTER CAME ALSO.

KHUKRIT: CHAO SISOUK? I HEARD SOME TIME AGO THAT HE WOULD GO ABROAD. HE HAS PASSED THROUGH ONLY. IT WAS REPORTED AT FIRST THAT HE WOULD GO TO ATTEND A MEETING OR CONFERENCE SOMEWHERE.

REPORTER: WHO ARE WE SENDING TO HOLD TALKS WITH GENERAL VANG PAO AND THE PERSONS ACCOMPANYING HIM WHO HAVE COME HERE?

KHUKRIT: OUR MILITARY AUTHORITIES ARE LOOKING AFTER HIM, FINDING A PLACE FOR THEM TO STAY AND DISARMING THEM IF THEY HAVE ANY WEAPONS. BUT SINCE HIS FAMILY IS COMPOSED OF WOMEN AND SMALL CHILDREN, THEY WILL MOST PROBABLY NOT HAVE ANYTHING MUCH WITH THEM.

REPORTER: SHOULD HE ASK FOR ASYLUM, WHAT ACTION DO YOU THINK OUGHT TO BE TAKEN?

KHUKRIT: HE HASN'T MADE ANY SUCH REQUEST YET, BUT IT MUST BE CONSIDERED FIRST. MY PERSONAL VIEW IS THAT I WOULD LIKE HIM TO RETURN TO LAOS, AND EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO TRY AND PERSUADE HIM. SHOULD HE RETURN TO LAOS, IT WOULD BE BETTER.

REPORTER: HAS THE GOVERNMENT DRAFTED ANY RULES AND REGULATIONS IN REGARD TO LAO REFUGEES YET, IN PREPARATION SHOULD THE SITUATION IN LAOS DETERIORATE FURTHER?

KHUKRIT: I DON'T THINK THAT THE SAME RULES AND REGULATIONS COULD BE USED AS FOR CAMBODIANS AND VIETNAMESE, BECAUSE OF THE LONG COMMON BORDER BETWEEN LAOS AND THAILAND. WE HAVE TOWNS SCATTERED WIDELY ALONG THE BANK OF THE MEKONG RIVER, AS CAN BE SEEN. FURTHERMORE, THE PEOPLE ALONG BOTH BANKS OF THE MEKONG RIVER CROSS BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS ALL THE TIME AND THEY HAVE CLOSE TIES, BECAUSE OF INTER MARRIAGE AND THE FACT THAT PEOPLE ON BOTH BANKS ARE RELATIVES. IT HAS BEEN USUAL WHEN ANY VIOLENT INCIDENTS OCCUR ON THE LAO SIDE FOR THE PEOPLE IN LAOS TO CROSS OVER AND COME TO THE THAI SIDE; THEN WHEN THE SITUATION BECOMES QUIET AGAIN THEY RETURN TO LAOS. IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CLOSE THE BORDER AND TO FORBID LAO FROM CROSSING OVER INTO THAILAND BECAUSE THEY HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO COMING HERE IN THE PAST,
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PAGE 03 BANGKO 08599 121316Z

UNTIL IT HAS BECOME A CUSTOM. WHEN ANY VIOLENCE OCCURS IN LAOS, THEY CROSS OVER INTO THAILAND AND THEY COME AND STAY WITH THEIR RELATIVES HERE, THEN THEY RETURN TO LAOS LATER WHEN IT IS SAFE. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE A VERY LARGE NUMBER OF THAIS WHO HAVE GONE TO EARN A LIVING IN LAOS.

REPORTER: I MEANT HIGH LEVEL LAO OFFICIALS.

KHUKRIT: CONSIDERATION WOULD HAVE TO BE PAID TO HIGH LEVEL OFFICIALS INDIVIDUALLY, HOW THEY HAVE ENTERED OUR COUNTRY,

ETC. WE WILL ENDEAVOR TO PUT PRESSURE ON MOST OF THEM TO GO TO LIVE IN OTHER COUNTRIES. IT WOULD BE UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO CARE FOR ALL LAO OFFICIALS IN OUR COUNTRY.

REPORTER: WE HAVE REFUSED TO GIVE POLITICAL ASYLUM TO VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIANS. COULDN'T WE USE THE SAME RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR LAO?

KHUKRIT: WAIT UNTIL THE TIME IS REACHED. THE SAME RULES AND REGULATIONS WILL MOST PROBABLY HAVE TO BE USED FOR HIGH LEVEL OFFICIALS -- FOR THEM TO PASS THROUGH AND GO ON TO ANY COUNTRY OF THEIR CHOICE. WE CAN'T BE EXPECTED TO LET THEM REMAIN HERE."
MASTERS

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